



EPISODE 2x04: "FIREWORKS"

Written by David Elmer and Katie Fiorino

Directed by George W. Krubski

Story Consultants: Serge Simard and Matt Engstrom

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Head Writer & Executive Producer: George W. Krubski

Producers: Matt Engstrom & David Elmer

Art Director: Sean Young

Casting Director: Katie Fiorino

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Teaser

EXT. PROSPERO – PROSPERO CITY – ESTABLISHING – DAY

PROSPERO CITY is larger, shinier, and more cosmopolitan than most of Serenity's stops. Everything looks new... so new, in fact, that much of the city still seems under construction.

Small ZEPPELINS fly between the spires rising from the sprawl of buildings below, and everything is so orderly and bright that there's no question the Alliance had a hand in building the place.

BLUE SUN TOWER rises from the center of town like a sharp and shiny knife, the tallest building in the city. It is a large metal-and-concrete building that looks like it'd be right at home in some of the major cities on 'Earth-that-Was'. The building has a large BLUE SUN logo emblazoned on the side, and a series of zeppelin-pads jutting out from the upper levels.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – ESTABLISHING – DAY

The streets are crowded with CELEBRATING FOLK. It's a holiday, and the many signs referencing "U-DAY!" and "Unification Day Parade Route" tell us which one. Families are already lining up along the parade route, BARKERS sell food and goods (including Alliance flags and Unification Day banners) and STREET ENTERTAINERS juggle, cavort, spit fire, and play with animals.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY STREETS – DAY

Three FIGURES wind their way through the crowd, the battered brown coat of the leader – MALCOLM REYNOLDS – drawing curious stares (and more than a few glares) as he plows on, a man with a mission. ZOE and JAYNE trail behind him.

JAYNE

Sure we can trust this guy?

ZOE

He and Mal are old friends.

JAYNE

(with emphasis)

Sure we can trust this guy?

ZOE

Had more than a few good paydays with Tony.

Beat, as Jayne puzzles it out.

JAYNE

Mal?

MAL

I'm sure he's forgotten all about Silverhold.

Mal stops in front of a bar called GOLDEN TICKET TAVERN. Zoe looks up.

ZOE

Malcolm Reynolds. In a bar. On U-Day. Imagine that.

INT. PROSPERO CITY – GOLDEN TICKET TAVERN – DAY

Mal, Zoe and Jayne push their way through the bustling CROWD, ignoring shouts from annoyed patrons, and make their way to a small table in a dimly lit corner.

Seated at the table is TONY, a grizzled-looking man with salt-and-pepper hair and a nose that looks like it's been broken and badly set more than once. A large bottle sits on the table, opened and partially empty, along with several shot glasses.

He looks up to see Mal, Zoe and Jayne approaching. He slams his shot glass onto the table and gets to his feet.

TONY

(slightly slurred)

Leo Harbatkin. Always knew we'd cross paths again, and I told myself I'd be prepared when we did.

Tony's hand slips into the pocket of his fancy jacket and he pulls out a gun, which he trains on Mal. Mal doesn't move a muscle.

Jayne, seeing this, draws his own gun and aims at Tony. Zoe puts a hand on Jayne's shoulder to keep him from firing.

Tony pulls the trigger, shooting Mal in the face... with a STREAM OF LIQUID. It's a squirt-gun.

MAL

Fun little holiday prop you got there...

Mal licks his wet lips.

MAL (cont'd)

Is that whiskey?

Tony shoots himself a stream in his own mouth and swallows hard.

TONY

How've you been, you <old rogue>? Last time I saw you, we were headed out of Silverhold on that flying scrap-heap you said was a ship!

MAL

<Old rogue>? Scrap-heap? Tony, what's with the insults?

TONY

(to Zoe)

Still beautiful, my dear. Much too beautiful to be flying with this <junkyard dog>, I always said. Figured you'd cut your losses and run.

(eyeing Jayne)

Who's the big lug with the gun who looked like he was gonna shoot my head off first and ask questions later?

MAL

That'd be Jayne. Hired him after Silverhold.

TONY

(indicates they should head to his table)

Come on, Mal, let me set you up with a drink. Man been through what you've been through oughta be drinking on a day like this. Makes U-Day tolerable.

Mal follows Tony and they both sit down. Jayne and Zoe move closer, but remain standing.

MAL

Well, you're tolerance always has been high, Tony. Me, I prefer to dull the pain by causin' some, 'specially if they're Alliance-friendly.

TONY

You wouldn't want to be trying anything like that here. Alliance has us pretty much under its thumb. Not that that's such a bad thing, mind.

Tony pours a round for the four of them.

TONY (cont'd)

Alliance and Blue Sun've done a lot for Prospero over the years, what with the moon bein' decimated by the war an' all. Hell, town was pretty much built by 'em.

When it becomes apparent that Mal and his crew aren't going to drink (despite Jayne's look of longing), Tony shrugs and downs first his glass, then Mal's.

MAL

Said you had a job for me and mine?

TONY

That I did. Y'see, I have a client who works for Blue Sun. He's having a bit of, uh, internal trouble, you might say.

Tony pauses in his tale and drinks Zoe's glass.

MAL

Corporate politics don't concern me, Tony.

TONY

Fair enough. Long story short, there's a bank near the middle of town has a sealed box stored in one of its vaults. Box contains what you might call sensitive information. That's where you come in.

Tony and Jayne eye the last filled glass.

TONY (cont'd)

You get me the box, I pay you, and we all have a nice U-Day.

Mal and Zoe share a look.

MAL

Job like this ain't gonna be easy.

TONY

That's why we're doin' it today. Staff'll be a skeleton crew because of the holiday, and once the parade starts, any back-up'll be delayed 'cause it'll have to cross the route. You hit it at the exact right time, it's like <taking a banana from a sleeping monkey>.

ZOE

(to Mal)

<Sleeping monkeys> wake up, sir.

MAL

Still, sounds like a fun way to spend the holiday, don't it?
(to Tony)

My crew's gonna need schematics of the bank, location of the vault... All the gritty details.

TONY

Taken care of.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – LANDING ZONE – ESTABLISHING

Prospero City's LANDING ZONE is large, covering several acres, and divided into sections. Because of the Unification Day festivities, the place is bustling with activity, with VISITORS disembarking from PASSENGER VESSELS and CARGO being unloaded from bright and shiny freighters, many with the Blue Sun logo stamped on them. The Blue Sun logo seems to be everywhere.

TONY (VO, cont'd)

Figured you wouldn't come all this way not to take the job, so I sent a runner to your ship.

We skim over the hustle and bustle of the landing zone to:

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Serenity sits at the far end of the landing zone, underneath a large neon sign, airlock doors open to let the planet's summer-like breezes cool the interior.

TONY (VO, cont'd)

She should be there any minute.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – DAY

KAYLEE sits on the HOVER-MULE, tinkering with part of the aft engine. RIVER stands nearby, watching. She points to a part that Kaylee has just taken out and is studying.

RIVER

That's not broken.

KAYLEE

(brightly)

Nope, but the Cap'n don't know no better. Says she's been ridin' rough since Boros, an' this gives me a chance to tinker.

RIVER

Still not broken. Shouldn't be fixing what's not broken. Leads to problems.

KAYLEE

(slightly uncomfortable)

Um, right. Tell, you what, I'll put the mule back together, and we'll go find Wash. He said he was gonna go explore, enjoy the U-Day festivities.

Although she's still taking to Kaylee, River starts to walk slowly toward the airlock door, an odd sense of anticipation on her face.

RIVER

I wish Simon were here.

KAYLEE

We'll see him soon, sweetie. Tomorrow. He's just takin' care of vaccinations on Haven.

RIVER

He used to take me to the U-Day carnival back home. He'd buy me cotton candy, and I'd dance. There were fireworks.

KAYLEE


Sounds like fun. I'm sure we can find cotton—

CASEY (OS)

Excuse me.

Kaylee glances toward the open airlock door and does a double-take. River stands facing CASEY, a young woman in worn and comfortable clothing (not dissimilar from Zoe's normal attire), with glasses, her hair pulled back into a ponytail. River and Casey are looking at one another curiously, and the reason for this is obvious.

Except for their clothing, Casey and River look identical.



Act One

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – CONTINUOUS

Beat.

Casey breaks the uncomfortable silence, but still can't take her eyes off River.

CASEY

I'm looking for the Firefly-class ship, The Happy Trader.

KAYLEE

Um... Who are... huh?

Casey and River continue to stare at one another, slowly circling in opposite directions, so that Casey winds up with her back to Kaylee.

CASEY
(distracted)
I'm Casey. I have a package for...
(beat, distracted)
Captain, uh, Harbatkin.

KAYLEE
Then you've come to the right place. I'm Kaylee, ship's mechanic.

River leans toward Casey, and reaches out to touch her. Casey involuntarily flinches as River removes her wire-rim glasses.

RIVER
Look in the mirror. Can't tell the difference.

Casey, disquieted, takes her glasses from River and puts them back on.

CASEY
Who... are you?

RIVER
River.

Awkward beat.

KAYLEE
You long lost relatives or somethin'? 'Cause the resemblance is a might... identical.

CASEY
I don't know. Maybe. I've no clue. I'm just—

RIVER
—just a girl. Me, too.

Casey finally breaks away from River and turns to Kaylee.

CASEY
Any idea on when Captain Harbatkin's due back? I'm supposed to wait.

KAYLEE
Captain should be back any time now. You can wait here. We'll just wait... here.

Off-key singing is heard from outside the cargo bay, through the airlock doors.

WASH (OS, singing)
"...turn a man into a mouse."

WASH walks into the ship, singing and munching on something.

WASH (singing)
(in between bites)
"Fruity Oaty Bars...make you bust out of your blouse!"

KAYLEE
Hi, Wash.

Wash seems to really be enjoying his Fruity Oaty Bar, and barely registers that folks are in the cargo bay.

WASH
(through a full mouth)
Captain back yet?

He spots Casey and freezes, almost dropping his bar.

WASH (cont'd)
<Holy heaven's underpants>! When did we get another one?!?

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – DAY

Mal, Jayne and Zoe make their way back to the landing zone, moving through the revelers and the carnival-like atmosphere. Jayne, taking in the sights, has wandered away slightly.

ZOE
Sir, much as it pains me to admit that Jayne might be right, Jayne might be right.

They watch a half-dozen young ALLIANCE SOLDIERS pass by.

ZOE (cont'd)
Too much blue in this city, you ask me. I know Tony's an old friend, but I'm not sure that I trust him.

MAL
Well, I'm sure I don't trust him, but we need the work, and we've done bank heists before.

JAYNE
Hey, Mal! Come check this out!

Mal and Zoe make their way over to Jayne, who is watching a HALF-DOZEN SCANTILY-CLAD FAT WOMEN attempt to build a human tower.

MAL

Now, that's just wrong.

ZOE

I don't know, sir. It's kind of fascinating.

JAYNE

Yeah, Mal. You wouldn't think they'd be able to stay up, what with 'em being so fat.

MAL

I can't believe I'm even having this conversation. C'mon, you too. Let's get back to the ship.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – DAY

Kaylee's finishing with the hover-mule, while Wash, Casey, and River sit on the balcony, looking down.

WASH

—told Mal that if he ever saw him again, he'd shoot him. But he kept the coin, so I think he was kidding.

(to himself)

I hope he was kidding.

CASEY

That does sound like Tony.

KAYLEE

(looking up)

So how long have you known him?

CASEY

Four months? Five? Five. He's a much better boss than his predecessor. He—

River's been studying Wash though this interchange.

RIVER

Finish the story.

WASH

(confused)

I already did, River.

RIVER

Didn't tell the part where you hid. Scared like a little girl.
Wanted to run.

Wash stands abruptly.

WASH

Story's over.

RIVER

No shame in it.

Wash heads down the stairs quickly, moving away from River.

WASH

Hey, look! Captain's back!

And, indeed, Mal, Zoe, and Jayne are back, walking up the ramp.

KAYLEE

And Tony didn't shoot him. Ain't that nice?

MAL

Well, actually— Hey, why's everyone always assume I'm gonna get shot?

ZOE

You do get shot more'n your fair share, sir.

Jayne nods agreement and Wash joins them, kissing Zoe.

MAL

Tony was gonna send someone over—

CASEY (OS)

Captain Harbatkin?

Mal looks up. Casey is on the stairs, River standing directly behind her.

Mal trips.

MAL

Wha-?

Jayne and Zoe look at each other, then at Wash, who shrugs.

WASH

Unnerving, isn't it?

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Mal sits at the head of the table, looking at a DATA-CARD READER displaying a map of the city, with "PARADE ROUTE" indicated. There are also a few small maps and another data-card nearby.

He's flanked by River and Casey. River watches Casey, mimicking her every move. Kaylee, Zoe, and Wash are also at the table. Jayne stands at the far side of the room, watching Casey and River with suspicion.

MAL
(distracted)
So, if we stick with the schedule, the parade will cut off
any chance of—

He cuts himself off, looking at River.

MAL (cont'd)
Can you stop that?

RIVER
Stop what?

CASEY
(almost simultaneously)
Stop what?

MAL
Just—don't.

River looks across the table at Casey.

RIVER
We should go.

CASEY
We... What?

MAL
No one's goin' nowhere. We got a job to do, an' this place
is full of Alliance <stench>.

RIVER
Won't go far.

CASEY
We could... We wouldn't leave the landing zone.

River looks at Mal expectantly.

ZOE

Sir, I'm not sure this is a good idea.

River stands, looking across the table. After a beat, Casey mirrors her.

KAYLEE

Cap'n, Simon—

MAL

Simon ain't here. She wants to go out, it's her choice.

(to River)

Keep your head down. Don't go far. We're gonna blow outta here quick when we get back. You ain't on the ship when we do it, I imagine your brother'll have more'n harsh words for me.

River nods to Mal and comes around the table to take Casey's hand.

RIVER

She has something to show.

Everyone watches, unsettled.

RIVER (cont'd)

Something to tell.

Casey allows herself to be pulled along by River, a tentative smile growing on her face as they exit through the aft doorway.

Beat.

JAYNE

Like one wasn't bad enough...

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – LANDING ZONE – DAY

Casey and River weave their way through the still-bustling crowds, and points up and over.

CASEY

There it is. Come on.

She's pointing to a TALL STEEL TOWER that overlooks the area. The two of them move toward it.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – LANDING ZONE – STEEL TOWER – LATER

Casey and River are at the top of the tower, sitting with their feet dangling over the edge. As they watch, a ZEPPELIN takes off and zooms past the tower, buffeting them with a backwash of wind.

They both laugh, and untangle their hair. River leans forward and adjusts Casey's glasses.

CASEY

I love to watch the zeppelins. Sometimes, when they fly by like that, I like to close my eyes and pretend I'm on one of them. One of the rich and fancy. One of the executives.

RIVER

They came in. Fixed the village.

Casey sweeps her arm out, encompassing everything in sight.

CASEY

That's right. This area used to just be nothing until Blue Sun and the Alliance came in.

(beat)

Gotta be careful, though, 'cause it's a long way down if you fall.

They both look down, and suddenly River leans forward, snatching the glasses off Casey's face.

CASEY

Hey!

RIVER

Easier to pretend if you can't see.

River puts the glasses on, holds her hair back.

RIVER (cont'd)

See? Now I'm you.

Casey starts to laugh despite herself. Another ZEPPELIN takes off, and they both close their eyes and smile into the wind.

After the zeppelin is gone, River carefully takes off the glasses, folds them, and then hands them to Casey, humming under her breath. The song must be an old standard, because Casey begins to hum along absently as well.

The pair of them sit comfortably for a few beats, humming and looking out at the city. It's perhaps a little creepy, then River switches from humming to singing.

RIVER
(absent-mindedly, sing-song, faintly)
"Two by two, hands of blue....
Little girl, you know them, too."

Casey stops humming and stares at River, her face suddenly becoming a mix of uncertainty and confusion, mingled with a little fear.

River keeps humming.

CASEY
Two by...? Hands of...?

River continues to hum, but now looks pointedly at Casey.

CASEY (cont'd)
You know them, don't you? The troubleshooters?

RIVER
Won't let you get away. Hunt you down like a dog and make sure you behave.

CASEY
They came here, interrogated me for hours... But then they just let me go, with their apologies—

RIVER
They never apologize.

CASEY
—They just let me go. It must've been you they were looking for.

RIVER
(enigmatic smile)
Liar. Not a good one.

CASEY
(same enigmatic smile)
I should've known you'd know.
(beat)
I'm not here to hurt you, River.

RIVER
I know.

They look at each other.

RIVER (cont'd)
(pointing)
Look! Here comes another one!

A large ZEPPELIN zooms overhead, its backwash nearly knocking both Casey and River off of the tower.

They close their eyes and laugh.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO HOLD – DAY

Mal, Zoe, Jayne, and Wash stand around, while Kaylee sits on the hover-mule.

MAL
We're gonna be in and out. Be gone less'n an hour.

KAYLEE
Takin' the mule?

ZOE
(shaking her head)
Got a rental lined up for this one.

MAL
You get her runnin' smooth again?

KAYLEE
Better'n ever, Cap'n!

MAL.
Good. Now, you make sure River stays put when she gets back. I don't want nothin' slowin' us down.
(to Wash)
An' you make sure we're ready for take off. I wanna be out of the world 'fore folks even realize somethin's been took.

ZOE
Don't steal the ship, darling.

WASH
Wouldn't do it without you.

MAL
Hey! I'm right here!

INT. GOLDEN TICKET TAVERN – DAY

Tony sits alone at the table. He stares at the empty bottle, toying with it. He puts a small handful of coins on the table, then rises tiredly, heading for the door.

EXT. SERENITY – DAY

River approaches Serenity, half-skipping and humming to herself.

Our view changes, and we're seeing her from a distance, THROUGH SOME SORT OF FUTURISTIC BINOCULARS, marked with distance, elevation, etc.

EXT. LANDING ZONE – SPOTTER'S POST

A YOUNG MAN (KARN) sits hidden in shadow in a half-constructed two-story building looking toward Serenity. He lowers his FUTURE BINOCULARS, and adjusts his HEADSET.

KARN (into headset)
Target has boarded the ship.

EXT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – ESTABLISHING – DAY

A large gleaming zeppelin hangs lazily over the outskirts of Prospero City.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – DAY

The interior of the zeppelin is all shiny chrome and utilitarian wood. THE MYSTERIOUS MAN who has pursued Serenity's crew since the first episode of the season stands in front of a large viewport that allows the zeppelin's occupants to gaze out on their surroundings. He is powerful-looking, perhaps a bit sinister, wearing a military uniform with no insignia.

An ALLIANCE OFFICER marches up and stops. The Mysterious Man turns.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
Report.

OFFICER
Sir, we've received visual confirmation that Captain Harbatkin's vessel, The Happy Trader, is indeed here. Sergeant Karn reports that the primary target is onboard.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Excellent. Tell Karn to hold position and report any change immediately. We'll move once all defensive elements are confirmed occupied.

OFFICER

(saluting)

Sir. Yes, sir.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

(to himself)

We'll show Blue Sun how this is done.

Act Two

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – DAY

Crowds of people have come out to watch the UNIFICATION DAY PARADE, lining the streets between the Blue Sun Tower and the landing zone.

The PARADE consists of the usual MARCHING BANDS, STREET PERFORMERS, and the like. There are also a series of huge FLOATS, primarily themed around the Alliance and their victories.

EXT. PROSPERO – LANDING ZONE – DAY

Serenity sits in the landing zone, surrounded by ships landing and taking off. TOURISTS pass the ship, most of them heading for the heart of the city and the festivities taking place there.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – DAY

Kaylee is finishing up a snack at the table. Wash comes in and heads for one of the cabinets.

KAYLEE

Any word?

Wash shakes his head. He takes two Fruity Oaty Bars out of the cabinet and offers one to Kaylee. As she looks at the wrapper, Wash peels open his own and begins to munch.

WASH

So... Should we be concerned at all about that girl who looks exactly like River?

KAYLEE

Well, it is pretty strange...

Wash gives her a "You think?" look.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

But River pretty much vouched for her, right?

WASH

And, yes, River's all about the good judgment. I mean, sure, she did try to kill Jayne and all, but a lot of her other decisions...

KAYLEE

That's not what I mean, and you know it. If there were something wrong with Casey, River would know is all.
(beat)

She's a reader.

Uncomfortable beat. Wash chews. Kaylee still hasn't opened her bar.

WASH

No, she's not.

KAYLEE

You know she is—

WASH

(scoffs)
That's crazy, Kaylee.

KAYLEE

It's the truth.

WASH

She's... intuitive, sure. Smart. Really smart, but...

KAYLEE

She's a reader.

RIVER (OS)

What're you guys taking about?

River stands in the doorway, barefoot, watching them. She's changed clothes since her return and is wearing a simple dress of dark blue.

KAYLEE
Sweetie, we were just...

Wash offers River the remnants of his Fruity Oaty Bar. She looks at it for a beat, then snatches it from his hand and throws it down the aft hallway.

Before Kaylee and Wash can react, she also grabs Kaylee's. This time, she tosses it on the ground and stomps on it.

RIVER
Bad for you.

WASH
(to Kaylee)
Good judgment, right?

KAYLEE
River, are you okay?

RIVER
(nods)
Now.

Beat. Wash leans forward.

WASH
So, River... What am I thinking?

KAYLEE
Wash, don't—

RIVER
(excited)
Oh! I love this game!
(beat)
Simon always wants to play.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

The parade is led by a massive CHINESE-STYLE DRAGON, carried on the shoulders of more than two dozen men. The dragon breathes smoke, and is emblazoned with the Blue Sun logo.

The crowd cheers as it troops past.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – BANK – SAME TIME

A non-descript CAR pulls to a stop in front of a large bank. The building is festooned with Alliance and Blue Sun flags, and the street has a light crowd, mostly centered around a series of food carts across the street.

INT. CAR – CONTINUOUS

Mal, Zoe and Jayne check their weapons.

ZOE
You ready, sir?

Mal nods and hands his gun to Zoe.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Kaylee and Wash are confused.

KAYLEE
Wait. What? Simon—

RIVER
He even keeps score.

River smiles and points at Kaylee.

RIVER (cont'd)
Confused. Right?
(beat)
I know I'm right.

River turns and studies Wash for a beat.

RIVER
(pointing at Wash)
Concerned. Scared.

WASH
Hey—What?!? I'm not scared!

RIVER
It's all right. Okay to be scared.

Kaylee and Wash look at each other. There's a feeling that things have gotten out of hand very, very quickly.

RIVER (cont'd)
(to Wash)
There were no puppets.

WASH
What?

RIVER
During the war. No puppets. Too scared.

KAYLEE
What do you—?

WASH
Of course there were puppets!

River shakes her head.

WASH (cont'd)
Everyone knows there were puppets! I flew one sortie
during the war, got shot down, and spent the rest of the
war in a prison camp!
(beat)
Keeping everyone entertained...
(lamely)
With the puppets.

RIVER
(matter-of-factly)
Liar.

Wash looks queasy.

KAYLEE
River!

RIVER
No shame in hiding.

WASH
I didn't hide.

RIVER
Running.

WASH
I didn't run!

River just looks at him.

WASH
(to Kaylee)
I didn't run.

KAYLEE
Wash, I...

Wash heads for the door to the foredeck hall.

WASH
(to himself)
I didn't run...

Kaylee and River watch him go.

INT. BANK – SAME TIME

The large bank lobby is squeaky clean and well-appointed. A single SECURITY GUARD, barely out of his teens, stands near the door. Four other EMPLOYEES are in the lobby (three behind the counter, one watering plants).

Mal walks in through the front door, which is apparently surrounded by a WEAPON DETECTION SYSTEM similar to that seen in "Shindig". It x-rays Mal but allows him through.

Mal stays in the doorway, keeping the glass door open with his foot.

SECURITY GUARD
Sir, today is a federal holiday. We're not open for business.

MAL
(indicates the door)
I'm gonna need you to shut that off.

SECURITY GUARD
Huh? Why?

MAL
Guns won't go through. Bullets will.

The guard turns back toward the open door. Zoe has a gun aimed directly at the guard. Jayne is standing to protect her from the casual observation of passers-by.

MAL (cont'd)
Now, son.

Beat. Mal scans the lobby. None of the others have realized yet. The guard's hand slips toward his gun.

MAL (cont'd)

Jin joh bu chi chi fah joh <Don't do this the hard way>.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

The parade continues. One of the floats depicts a comical reenactment of a battle, possibly the Battle of Serenity, in which soldiers and "CLOWNCOATS" (clowns dressed as Browncoat infantrymen) fight for control of a ONE-MAN CANNON. Periodically, one side or the other will seize control of it, firing the cannon and sending a massive blast of FIREWORKS into the sky overhead.

INT. BANK – SAME TIME

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne, all with weapons in hand, have control of the room. Zoe has disarmed the guard and stands near him.

JAYNE

(to the gardener)

On your knees unless you're lookin' for a hole.

Mal moves to the three employees behind the counter.

MAL

No one gets hurt, if y'all keep smiling at the floor, and point me in the direction of the vault.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man stands in front of a small desk anchored to one wall. A wall-mounted VIEWSCREEN flickers to life, showing the interior bridge of an ALLIANCE PATROL BOAT. CAPTAIN CHIEN stands at attention.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Captain Chien.

CHIEN (on viewscreen)

Sir. I trust everything is proceeding as planned on the planet's surface?

MYSTERIOUS MAN

He took the bait like a fish. <Brigands> are so predictable.

CHIEN (on viewscreen)
Sir, if I may, I'd suggest you don't underestimate Harbatkin. I've been studying the files and reports, and there are some things that don't add up...

The Mysterious Man paces away from the viewscreen, but the room is small and there's no real place for him to go.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
Happy Trader, May Hawk, Serenity, *Joo How Rin*... I'm well aware of the various vessel names associated with Captain Harbatkin, not to mention his own sundry aliases.
(beat)
The name of the vessel, or even her captain, doesn't concern me. We have visual confirmation of the primary target, and that is all that matters, Captain.

CHIEN (on viewscreen)
Still, sir... He may be more than just a common criminal.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
You're referring to the report from the Magellan last year?

CHIEN (on viewscreen)
It's possible that he has powerful... friends, sir.

The Mysterious Man returns to the viewscreen.

MYSTERIOUS MEN
There's no reason to believe the Magellan report is anything other than a clever ploy perpetrated by Harbatkin himself. The Old Man wouldn't associate with his kind, even if he hadn't died at the end of the war.

CHIEN (on viewscreen)
Unconfirmed speculation, as I understand it.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
Surely you don't believe the rumors?
(scoffs, to himself)
Holy orders, indeed.

The Mysterious Man smiles at Chien.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (cont'd)
No matter. We'll have Tam, Harbatkin, and his entire crew bound by law by day's end.
(beat)
Our hunt is almost over, Captain.

INT. BANK – VAULT – SAME TIME

The vault is a small room, the walls lined with LOCK-BOXES. There's a table in the center of the room on which folks could place a box to examine the contents.

Mal rushes in, lays his gun on the table, and pulls a piece of paper out of his coat pocket. The paper is one of the ones he got from Casey, and it contains a number.

Mal quickly scans the numbers on the boxes, finding the one that matches the one on the page. He finds it, and yanks the LOCK-BOX out, which is small and flat, little larger than a metallic envelope, clearly intended to house documents or data-cards.

Mal crams it in his belt, concealed by his jacket, and runs for the door.

Deep in the cavity left by the now-absent box, a RED LIGHT blinks to life.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man is just turning away from the now-dark viewscreen. He looks at his personal COM DEVICE, which has a blinking red light.

He hits a button to deactivate the light, then flips the device on.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (into com)
Commander Dent, prepare your men to seize the vessel.
Captain Harbatkin is currently... distracted.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

The parade rolls down a crowded street. Children on either side run along, laughing and pointing at the dragon, which marches past:

EXT. BANK – SAME TIME

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne stand awkwardly, hiding their weapons, watching the parade. The car they came in is hemmed in by the crowd.

MAL
Well... That ain't right.

ZOE
Parade's not supposed to be in this part of town for another ten minutes.

MAL
Not supposed to be on this street at all.

JAYNE
We're humped.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits in the pilot's chair. His DINOSAUR TOYS are in front of him, but he's not playing. River appears behind in at the bridge entrance.

RIVER
She knows.

Wash doesn't react.

RIVER (cont'd)
You don't think she does, but she does.

Wash turns.

WASH
Who? Zoe?

RIVER
Knows your big secret. Knows what you hide from her.

Before Wash can respond, the COM beeps. He leans over, picks it up, listens.

WASH (into com)
Casey?

River perks up.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY - STREETS – SAME TIME

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne do their best to blend in with the crowd, moving slowly down the block.

MAL
Gorram <mangled-up mess>!

Tony suddenly emerges from the bustling crowd. He's wearing a big, floppy hat.

TONY
Finally! I've never seen Prospero City this gorram crowded!

MAL
(indicating the parade)
What's this?!?

TONY
You get the box?

Mal shows it, but holds it protectively away from Tony. He looks like he's ready to haul off and hit Tony, but his COM UNIT beeps.

EXT. SERENITY – DAY

River walks down the ramp of the ship and joins with the passing crowd of tourists.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – DAY

The Mysterious Man sits at his desk. When his com unit beeps, he pulls it out.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (into com)
Yes?

KARN (via com)
Sir, the target has just left.

Beat.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (into com)
Left?

KARN (via com)
Affirmative. She left the ship and appears to be headed for the city.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (into com)
(sighs)
Follow her.

He clicks the com, making a call.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (cont'd, into com)
Commander Dent, hold for the moment.

EXT. PROSPERO – LANDING ZONE – DAY

River weaves her way in and out of the meandering crowds that fill the concourses of the landing zone.

When she pauses to watch a group of DANCERS, Karn moves closer to her, but accidentally collides with a MERCHANT BOY. River hears the commotion, glances over, and, laughing, joins the throng of dancers. By the time Karn has regained his composure, she's vanished.

KARN (into com)
Sir, we may have a problem.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

As Tony, Zoe, and Jayne cluster around him, Mal speaks into his com.

MAL (into com)
Gorram right that sounds like a problem, Wash! Get—
(beat)
Just get her back onboard!

EXT. LANDING ZONE – HANGAR – SAME TIME

The hangar is a simple affair, capable of housing a small air- or spacecraft.

DENT (VO)
We move as soon as we get the word.

INT. HANGAR – SAME TIME

Two dozen ALLIANCE SOLDIERS, equipped in SWAT-style gear and surrounded by piles of high-tech equipment, are making final preparations. COMMANDER DENT adjusts his bulletproof vest and looks at his men.

DENT (cont'd)
Our orders are simple, men. Surround and seize the
Firefly-class vessel and apprehend all aboard.

Dent holds up a CAPTURE of River Tam. Behind him, the hangar doors slide open, spilling in sunlight.

DENT (cont'd)
Our primary target must be apprehended alive.

RIVER (OS)
Excuse me?

The guards all whirl to look at the now-open doors and see, silhouetted by sunlight—River Tam.

RIVER (cont'd)
Are you looking for me?

Act Three

EXT. PROPERO – STREETS – MOMENTS LATER

Mal, speaking into the com, stands slightly away from Zoe, Jayne, and Tony.

Celebrating folk continue to walk past. An OLD WOMAN with rotting teeth approaches Tony, trying to persuade him to buy bright, blue colored PINWHEELS for Zoe. Jayne is clearly amused; Zoe is not.

MAL (into com)
And, wait... Casey told you that? How would she—?

INT. HANGAR – SAME TIME

Commander Dent and his soldiers have surrounded River. River is unresisting, hanging in the soldier's grips lifelessly, her eyes blank, lips slightly ajar. They move as if she's whispering, but she makes no sound.

DENT (into com)
We've got her, sir.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

Mysterious Man's face lights up in victory.

DENT (cont'd, via com)
The primary target is secure.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
Excellent work, Commander Dent. I will be arriving shortly to collect her.

EXT. LANDING ZONE – SAME TIME

Using hand signals, Dent portions a half dozen of his men to take control of River. They approach her cautiously, perhaps even a bit... fearfully.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (via com)
Harbatkin and his crew will be returning soon.

Dent continues to issue silent commands. The soldiers move quickly to comply.

DENT (into com)
Karn will take over here. I'll take control of Tam
and have her prepared for your arrival.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (cont'd, via com)
Tell Karn to position the men carefully. We don't
want any innocent citizens injured, and we wouldn't
want to spoil any... surprises for Captain Harbatkin.

EXT. STREETS – MOMENTS LATER

Mal puts away his com, muttering angrily and inarticulately in Chinese.

ZOE
Sir?

MAL
It was a trap. Read my lips. T-R-A-P. This—
(he gestures towards the city)
—the whole lot of it was just a distraction, a set up.
Real job was grabbin' River.

ZOE
How do we know—

Mal's barely listening, looking around, for a path through the crowd.

ZOE (cont'd)
Sir!

MAL
(distracted)
We gotta get back to the ship. Now.

ZOE
We know where they took her?

JAYNE
Do we wanna know that?

MAL
(ignoring Jayne)
Not yet, but I swear by my <ragged> brown coat,
I'm gonna find out. Zoe, I want you to—

TONY
No, you don't want her to, Leo.

Mal slowly turns on Tony, piecing it together. Tony is impersonal and calm. For him, at least, this is all business.

MAL
<Pardon>?

TONY
Whatever you were gonna have Zoe do, you don't want her to.

MAL
You knew, didn't you?

TONY
What you want to do is run. The feds are waiting for you back at the ship.

Beat. Then, Mal rushes forward, grabbing Tony by the shirt collar.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash and Kaylee look at each other.

KAYLEE
Wash, what do we do?

Wash stands up, puffs himself up for a Big Damned Hero moment.

WASH
We—

He deflates.

WASH (cont'd)
We do what we always do.
(beat)
We wait.

Wash returns to his seat, looking sad and defeated.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

Zoe pulls Mal off Tony... just barely. Folks in the crowd start to notice that something is going on.

ZOE
(to Tony)
Best explain yourself quickly.

JAYNE
(malicious grin)
Lady's husband is sittin' in that gorram ship.

Tony looks at Mal, façade finally breaking. He looks like a desperate drunk.

TONY
I didn't have any choice, Mal. I'm sorry. They
caught me for trafficking, said they'd clear my file if
I gave 'em Leo Harbatkin... I'm sorry, Mal.

Mal pushes him away in disgust.

TONY (cont'd)
I can arrange for you and your friends to
disappear. Should be able to get the others
released, too.
(beat)
They don't really want you. Just some girl you had
as a passenger.

Mal decks Tony, knocking his hat off and sending him flying back into the crowd.
Those nearby are startled enough that many of them turn away from the parade.

ZOE
Mal...

JAYNE
Startin' to draw a crowd here, Mal.

Jayne glares at those nearby, trying to get them to back off.

ZOE
What're we gonna do, sir?

MAL
Do? No one takes my ship. Or your husband.
(beat)
And ain't no way we're losin' that girl on my watch.

Mal throws the box at Tony, who is struggling to get up, and stalks down the street,
toward the landing zone, Zoe a step behind him.

Jayne watches them disappear into the crowd, then leans down over Tony.

JAYNE
So, um... You got our coin on ya or what?

EXT. ABOVE THE LANDING ZONE – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man's command zeppelin sails through the sky, a triumphant silver figure against a sky of blue.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man stands in front of the viewscreen, which now shows a static image of River.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
At last, little girl, we will stand face to face. The things we will learn...

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

Mal and Zoe are hung up by the enthusiastic crowd packed around the "Clowncoat" float. Mal watches humorlessly as the Alliance soldiers and the Clowncoats continue to battle over a large piece of artillery.

An Alliance soldier seizes the artillery piece and it shoots out fireworks, lighting the sky with blue and purple. The crowd erupts into cheers.

Then, a Clowncoat seizes the artillery. The crowd jeers and laughs as it shoots black smoke into the Clowncoat's bewildered face.

MAL
Gorram <blue-colored pile of feces>.

JAYNE (OS)
They ain't half bad...

Jayne has caught up with them. He's holding his side, possibly injured, but Mal doesn't notice. Mal's eyes are smoldering; he's had about as much as he can take.

JAYNE (cont'd)
C'mon, Mal, you gotta admit it's funny!

Before he can snap at Jayne, Mal's com unit beeps.

EXT. LANDING ZONE – SAME TIME

The command zeppelin comes in for a landing. Many of the tourists turn to point – it's an impressive vehicle.

Two black-clad FIGURES watch its progress, then turn and disappear into the crowd.

EXT. LANDING ZONE COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man opens the door to the zeppelin's gondola. Commander Dent and a half-dozen soldiers are waiting, surrounding River, who seems near-catatonic.

The Mysterious Man kicks down a staircase, and the soldiers begin to board.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits in the pilot's seat, working feverishly, flipping buttons, studying data streaming on screens. Kaylee stands over his shoulder, listening into a headset and periodically pointing to the screens.

MAL (via com)

What do you have for me? <Tell me you have something>.

WASH (into com)

Maybe.

He looks up at Kaylee and she nods.

WASH (cont'd, into com)

Looks like maybe... Mal, I think there's an Alliance patrol boat in orbit. Maybe more than one. There's a—

KAYLEE

It's a zeppelin, Wash! That's how they're gettin' her out!

WASH

You sure?

She focuses on the headset for a beat, then nods.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne are still hung up near the float.

On the float, an Alliance soldier has seized the gun once more, but this time no fireworks emerge. Instead, the Alliance soldiers chase the scampering Clowncoats around and the Clowncoats trip over each other's coattails. Jayne laughs.

KAYLEE (VO)

High-priority military codes on the sixty-six.
They're clearin' all airspace over Prospero City right
now, givin' them a free path to the orbital
platforms.

EXT. LANDING ZONE – SAME TIME

The command zeppelin flies past Casey's tower.

WASH (VO)

Mal! They've got River on a zeppelin!

Casey, in her perch, watches it fly overhead.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

On the float, the Alliance soldiers and the Clowncoats continue their capering. The Alliance soldiers begin to dance, juggling blue colored sparklers.

Jayne is distracted by the performance, but Mal and Zoe are all business, scanning the sky.

ZOE

Sir!

(pointing)

There!

The command zeppelin sails across the sky, the only object against the clear blue.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash and Kaylee are concerned, nervous.

WASH (into com)

Is there anything we can do, Mal?

MAL (via com)
Can you take off?

WASH (into com)
Port Authority's got a land-lock on us. Sorry, Mal.

MAL (via com)
Then there's nothin'... See if you can break free,
or— Can you use one of the shuttles?

WASH (into com)
If they thought to land-lock us, they're probably
ready for that, too.

MAL (via com)
Just wait for us to get back.

Wash smacks the controls in frustration, then throws himself back in his chair.

WASH
Just like usual.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

The battle between the Alliance soldiers and the Clowncoats upon the float has started up again. The Alliance soldiers gracefully knock over Clowncoat after Clowncoat as the crowd laughs and cheers.

In the crowd nearby, Mal looks at Zoe.

MAL
We gotta stop that zeppelin. <I will not let them
have her>.

Zoe looks up.

ZOE
I don't disagree, sir, but I don't see that we have
too many options.

One Clowncoat weaves through the chaos on his hands and knees, his confused and bewildered expression not unlike a dog's, as he makes his way to the artillery. He lets out a sneaky laugh, aims the large gun towards the sky, and pulls a brown colored lever. Black smoke shoots in his face. Jayne and the crowd cheer.

Mal looks at Zoe then cocks his head towards the float.

ZOE
Sir, you can't be ser—

MAL
You even need to ask?
(beat)
Ready?

ZOE
Always.

Zoe nods, standing up straighter than before. Mal starts to make his way through the crowd. Zoe roughly punches Jayne on the shoulder to get his attention.

JAYNE
Hey! Gorram it! I'm watchin' the show!

EXT. ABOVE PROSPERO CITY – SAME TIME

The command zeppelin sails higher and higher.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man has returned to his office, and has River seated at his desk, handcuffed to the chair. He paces the room, studying her, perhaps waiting for some response from the seemingly-catatonic girl.

When his back is to River, she smiles.

EXT. CLOWNCOAT FLOAT – SAME TIME

A full-blown brawl is underway.

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne have gotten onto the float, launching an attack on Alliance soldiers and Clowncoats alike. The crowd cheers even louder than ever before, pleased at the change of pace.

Jayne begins to hurl Clowncoats into the crowd as Zoe cracks an Alliance solider on the back of the head with the handle of her gun.

Mal approaches the artillery. He punches the Alliance solider beside it squarely in the jaw, sending him flying across the float, and leaving Mal with a clear path to the big gun's controls.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man notices River stirring.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
You're awake, my dear. Excellent.

He smiles.

River bends down, flicks some dirt off her shoe. Then she stands. Stretches.

His smile disappears.

The handcuffs lie open, still connected to the chair.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
How did you—?

EXT. CLOWNCOAT FLOAT – SAME TIME

Mal puts his eye to the scope, focusing up on the zeppelin.

The artillery's controls and scope are eerily similar to the big gun Mal fired in Serenity Valley in the opening moments of the pilot.

Mal lines up the shot, squeezes the trigger—

And nothing happens.

MAL
Juh shi suh mo go dohng shee <What the hell is
this crap>!

Mal spots two levers, one brown and one blue. He pulls the blue lever.

FIREWORKS shoot out of the gun, erupting into a sparkling Blue Sun Logo directly behind the command zeppelin, which has continued to sail across the sky.

INT. LANDING ZONE – HANGAR – SAME TIME

Karn stands in front of a dozen and a half Alliance soldiers.

KARN
Once you're in position, you will hold until I give
the order to move in. We will wait until Captain
Harbatkin and his associates—

FIGURE#1 (OS)

No.

Karn turns to the open doors. The two Figures now stand silhouetted in light, their features obscured. Their long shadows stretch across the hangar floor.

KARN

Wha—? Who are you?

The soldiers are disquieted. Something is... off.

FIGURE#2

We're here to deal with this situation.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

River takes a step toward the Mysterious Man.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Eta kooram nah sme ch.

River takes another step. She smiles.

MYSTERIOUS MAN (cont'd)

(nervous)

What—?

The zeppelin rocks, the floor swaying under them both.

EXT. CLOWNCOAT FLOAT – SAME TIME

Mal continues to fire at the command zeppelin, sending blue, purple, and red fireworks into the sky as he desperately tries to force the vehicle to land.

ZOE

Sir, be careful not to—

MAL

I know, gorrammit!

Zoe throws a Clowncoat off the edge of the float. The crowd is now too entranced by the action in the sky to pay attention to what's happening on the float.

At the big gun, Mal bites his lip, sending more fireworks into the sky.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man and River both regain their footing, but the zeppelin is now rocking constantly and the explosions of the fireworks can be heard from outside. Vibrant color splashes through the viewports, bathing the two of the in fleeting shades of purple and blue.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

How... River... I don't understand...

RIVER

I'm sure you don't. You civil servants never do.

(beat)

It's simple, really. If we can't have her back,
neither can you.

INT. LANDING ZONE – HANGAR – SAME TIME

Karn confronts the two silhouetted figures, clearly annoyed.

KARN

I don't know who you are, but you will stand aside.
Now. We have our orders.

FIGURE#1

As do we.

The Figures turn toward each other, lift up their hands, perfectly in synch. They are wearing BLUE GLOVES, and each holds a ROD-LIKE DEVICE that begins to hum.

The figures are the BLUE HANDS, the TROUBLESHOOTERS.

EXT. CLOWNCOAT FLOAT – SAME TIME

Mal continues to fire.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash and Kaylee look through the front window, concerned and silent, watching fireworks explode around the zeppelin.

INT. COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

The Mysterious Man faces off against River.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
You won't get away with this.

RIVER
Of course we will.

EXT. ABOVE PROSPERO CITY – SAME TIME

The fireworks shoot into the zeppelin – a direct hit.

COMMAND ZEPPELIN – SAME TIME

River and the Mysterious Man begin to circle each other, lit by the fireworks, rocked by the near-misses.

MYSTERIOUS MAN
Parliament won't allow it.

RIVER
(scoffs)
Parliament? We own Parliament.

EXT. ABOVE PROSPERO CITY – SAME TIME

The command zeppelin blows, sending bright yellow, orange, and green sparks shooting through the sky as it begins to plummet and burn.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

The crowd is confused. Some folks cheer, thinking this is just part of the show, while others are horrified.

EXT. CLOWNCOAT FLOAT – SAME TIME

Mal looks up in horror, taking a step away from the gun, but unable to take his eyes away from the zeppelin.

MAL
Oh, God. No.

Act Four

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Kaylee stands at the front window looking out and up.

KAYLEE
River! River!

Behind her, Wash just sits, stunned and silent.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
(whimpering)
River...

She looks like she's on the verge of collapse, takes a wandering, shocked step away from the window. Wash snaps out of it, jumps to his feet and grabs Kaylee by the shoulders, easing her into the chair he was just sitting in.

WASH
Shh... shh...

KAYLEE
Oh, God...
(beat)
Oh, God, I'm going to have to tell Simon...

Wash leans forward and Kaylee hugs him, crying into his shoulder.

EXT. CLOWNCOAT FLOAT – SAME TIME

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne are alone on the clownfloat, Mal and Jayne staring up as Zoe scans the area.

Around them, the crowd is screaming wildly, some running, trying to get away as the zeppelin continues to lose altitude, others cheering, excited by the display. There is panic and melee.

Jayne, Zoe, and Mal's stillness is a stark contrast to the crowd.

JAYNE
(shocked)
Was she really <in that thing>?

In the distance, the sound of sirens. Zoe reacts, but Mal and Jayne are distracted, in shock.

ZOE

Sir.

Zoe steps over to Mal, grabs him firmly by the shoulder.

ZOE

Mal?

Mal doesn't react.

ZOE (cont'd)

Sergeant Reynolds!

His head snaps up.

ZOE (cont'd)

Sir, we can grieve later. Right now we need to go.

Mal nods, licks his lips, reacting to the sound of the approaching sirens.

Beat, then he moves toward the artillery again, testing the levers.

MAL

Jayne! Get over here! Now!

INT. ALLIANCE PATROL BOAT – BRIDGE

The bridge is tense, everyone working quietly and intensely at their posts. Captain Chien stands in front of the giant viewport, but faces away from it, anxiously studying his CREW.

CREWMEMBER#1 (into com unit)

Sergeant Dent?

CREWMEMBER#2 (into com unit)

Sergeant Karn?

Chien turns to LIEUTENANT WALLACE.

CHEIN

Do we have confirmation?

WALLACE

Yes, sir. The command zeppelin is down.

Chien looks sick, stricken.

CHIEN

Offer our assistance to the locals. If there's anything we can do to help them look for survivors—

The doubt on Wallace's face says it all.

CHIEN (cont'd)

We need to recover any remains. Parliament will want confirmation on both River Tam and their Operative.

Wallace nods, and moves to comply. In the background, work continues.

CREWMEMBER#1 (into com unit)

Sergeant Dent?

INT. LANDING ZONE – HANGAR – SAME TIME

Sergeant Karn's com unit lies on the floor—

CREWMEMBER#2 (via com)

Sergeant Karn?

—at the edge of a river of blood originating from Karn's mouth, eyes and nose. Karn is clearly dead.

The blue-handed Troubleshooters stand calmly in the midst of the bodies of Karn and his men, each of whom lies sprawled in a pool of their own blood, eyes open with tear-trails of blood down their cheeks.

The Troubleshooters casually put the rod-like devices back into their pockets.

In the background, outside the hangar, volley after volley of FIREWORKS goes up over the city.

EXT. PROSPERO CITY – STREETS – SAME TIME

Local ALLIANCE SOLDIERS force their way through the crowd toward the Clowncoat float, which is surrounded by a massive CLOUD OF BLACK SMOKE. Every few seconds, FIREWORKS shoot out of the cloud.

The soldiers and crowd scream, cough, and shout.

Chaos. Confusion.

INT. CLOWNCOAT FLOAT – SAME TIME

One of the soldiers has managed to fight his way through the smoke to the artillery piece.

Coughing and choking, he looks at the controls. Both levers, brown and blue, have been forced down and broken off.

There's no sign of the perpetrators.

EXT. LANDING ZONE – SAME TIME

The landing zone is chaotic, too, as folks head toward the city and the commotion, pointing at the fireworks bursting rhythmically and somewhat bizarrely overhead.

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne walk against the crowd. Zoe is on the alert, one hand tense at her side, near her gun, the other on Mal's shoulder, guiding him forward.

MAL
I didn't mean to...

ZOE
I know, sir.

MAL
Was just tryin' to stop...

Zoe nods. She catches sight of Jayne, still holding his side.

ZOE
You okay?

JAYNE
Just got knocked around is all.

ZOE
Doc can see to you when we get to—

She cuts herself off and looks at Mal.

MAL
(to Zoe)
How we gonna tell him?

EXT. SERENITY – RAMP – MOMENTS LATER

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne approach Serenity. Wash and Kaylee are waiting for them.

MAL

Kaylee...

He falters, looks away for a moment. She runs down the ramp and hugs him. As she does, Zoe strides past, to Wash.

WASH

I'm sorry, honey, there was nothing I could do.

Beat, then Zoe finally falters as they embrace.

ZOE

I know, baby. I know.

KAYLEE

Cap'n...

MAL

Kaylee... River, she... I didn't mean...

Jayne looks around nervously. In the distance, there are sounds of chaos, but nothing near Serenity. Jayne spots something the rest of them don't see.

JAYNE

Hey...

He takes a few steps away from the group toward...

Casey, who strides toward them all with purpose.

Gradually, the others notice, as Casey approaches taking off her glasses and shaking out her hair.

CASEY

What are you boobs doing?

Not Casey at all. River. Clearly River, from the bare feet and the moonbrain grin.

RIVER (cont'd)

We should get going...

They all stare at her in shock and disbelief. A beat, then Kaylee runs to hug River tight.

EXT. LANDING ZONE – LATER

Serenity takes off. Even the ship seems glad that all this is over. In the distance, the fireworks slow but continue.

RIVER (cont'd, VO)
...before they change their minds.

EXT. LANDING ZONE – HANGAR – SAME TIME

The Troubleshooters watch Serenity lift up and fly away. Troubleshooter#1 pulls out a tiny WAVE UNIT. He activates it, and an image of a MAN, cold and self-satisfied, appears.

MATHIAS
Did everything go as planned?

TROUBLESHOOTER#1 (into com)
The subject escaped, Doctor Mathias...

Both Troubleshooters calmly watch Serenity fly toward:

EXT. BLUE SUN TOWER – CONTINUOUS

Blue Sun Tower rises from the center of town like a sharp and shiny knife, the tallest building in the city.

Serenity flies past and up.

TROUBLESHOOTER#1 (cont'd, VO)
...per the Board's directive.

EXT. SERENITY – ESTABLISHING

Serenity sails through the black.

INT. SERENITY – KITCHEN – SAME TIME

Mal and Zoe sit at the table, eating, looking beat. Jayne, still holding his side, grabs some food and heads out the foredeck hall exit.

Kaylee and River, bright and laughing, are in the corner NOOK, playing cards.

RIVER
Win again!

KAYLEE
That's not fair!

RIVER
Not cheating. I swear!

Kaylee gives her a look.

RIVER (cont'd)
(giggling)
Maybe...

They laugh and continue to play. At the table, Mal looks up from his food and smiles at them.

ZOE
(to Mal)
Sir, when we get to Haven...

MAL
What're we gonna tell Simon? I conjure there's things the boy needs to know. Fact that the Alliance is getting mighty grabby when it comes to River bein' at the top of that list, but ain't no one gotta tell 'im we let her get off the ship.
(beat)
And 'specially no one's gotta tell him about that gorram zeppelin.

ZOE
Sir, maybe we do tell Simon 'bout that zeppelin. With it crashing, Alliance should be thinkin' River's dead. Imagine the doctor'd be happy to hear this.
(beat)
And what happened after.

Mal and Zoe share a look.

INT. ALLIANCE PATROL BOAT – CHIEN'S OFFICE

Captain Chien sits quietly in his office, not at his desk, but at a small table, staring thoughtfully at the WEI-CHI BOARD there, which is in the middle of an unfinished game.

WALLACE (OS)
Sir?

Chien looks up.

WALLACE (cont'd)
What are our orders, sir?

CHIEN
Our target is dead. The Parliament's Operative is dead...

Chien leans forward and begins to clear the pieces off the board.

CHIEN (cont'd)
Our mission is at an end.

INT. SERENITY – JAYNE'S BUNK

Jayne drops down his ladder. He looks around furtively, then pulls something out from under his jacket, where he's been holding his side.

Tony's lock-box.

Jayne picks it up, shakes it, listening. Fiddles with it for a moment, but it remains unopened.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – LATER

Wash is in the pilot's seat, Mal and Zoe over his shoulder. River sits in the co-pilot's seat, focusing intently on one of the screens.

MAL
(to Wash)
And Universe? He can take care of it?

WASH
(nodding)
Harbatkin'll be dead within the week. Terrible, terrible refueling accident. Seems there won't be anything left of the good captain or The Happy Trader.

MAL
That should be the last connection.

ZOE
For the first time in over a year...

MAL
We're free.

River taps something on the screen she's watching, then looks up at them.

RIVER
Not free.
(beat)
Never free.

Mal, Zoe, and Wash look at one another uneasily.

MAL
Doesn't hurt to pretend for awhile, does it, little one?

Mal gives Wash a clap on the shoulder and heads for the door. Zoe kisses Wash and follows the Captain out. Wash and River are now alone on the bridge. Wash looks very uncomfortable.

RIVER
She knows your secret.

Wash looks at River guiltily, almost scared.

RIVER (cont'd)
Could have a better life. A different life. No guns, no danger. Safety and security and a home and a future.
(beat)
But without her.

WASH
I...

RIVER
She knows what you do for her.

River smiles at him as she hits a few keys on the monitor.

RIVER (cont'd)
You're her hero.

Wash smiles back at her and leans forward over the controls.

SIMON (OS, via Wave monitor)
What was that, *mei-mei*? I lost your signal for a minute.

River turns back to the WAVE MONITOR. She's talking to her brother, SIMON.

RIVER (to Wave monitor)
Nothing. Interference.

SIMON (via Wave monitor)

So, did you have a good time with your friend,
River? Did you have cotton candy? Did you enjoy
the fireworks?

RIVER (to Wave monitor)

No cotton candy, but I watched the fireworks. They
were sad.

BLACKOUT